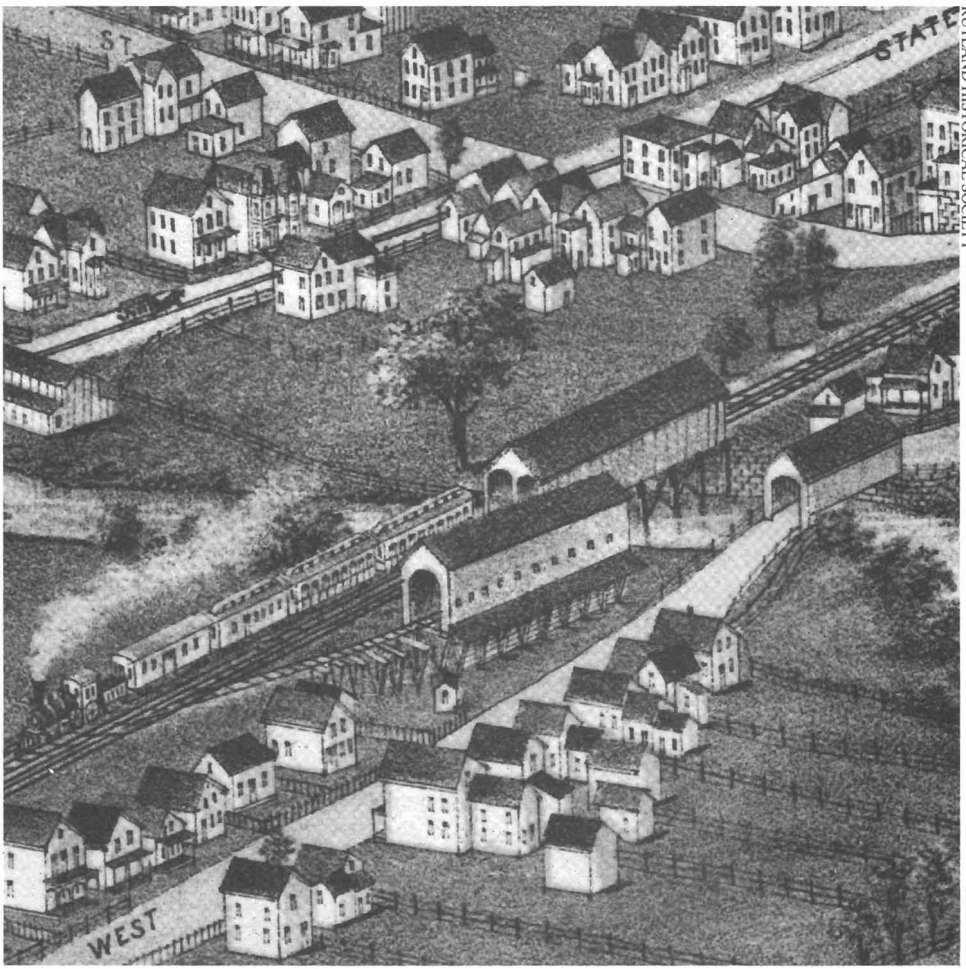
RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Quarterly

VOLUME 32 NO. 4 2002

The Covered Bridges of Old Rutland Town: A Calendar



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **East Creek Railroad Bridge No. 88** crossed the East Creek in Rutland City on the Central Vermont and Delaware & Hudson tracks just north of the West Street Bridge. It was a Howe truss type bridge with a double lane. The builder is unknown. The 111-foot bridge was built sometime before 1883 but replaced by a steel bridge after 1897.*

About the Author

Robert J. Cassidy is a life member of the Rutland Historical Society, an active member of the Building Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors. A native of Rutland, he is a graduate of Rutland High School and a history major at Castleton State College. He is also a member of the Vermont Air National Guard and holds the rank of Staff Sergeant.

Robert has been active in the Society since his high school days. He is a life member of the Vermont Covered Bridge Society and has compiled a large amount of research on Vermont's covered bridges. Recently he produced the Society's exhibit on the "Covered Bridges of Rutland."

Introduction

Today covered bridges around the United States are visited every year by thousands of curious tourists and covered bridge enthusiasts. For many people these structures act as gateways to an earlier day when life and times were simpler.

New England winters were very hard on its wooden bridges. Spring snowmelts caused rivers to swell and overflow their banks. Traditional bridges with their supports underneath would easily wash out. Putting the supports above the bridges made them less susceptible to destruction by spring thaws.

Bridge builders began to think of ways to improve the life span of their bridges. Richard Sanders Allen in his book, *Covered Bridges of the Northeast,* relates that in 1805 bridge builder Timothy Palmer built a "permanent bridge" over the Schuylkill River at Philadelphia. When he finished the bridge, the president of the bridge company suggested enclosing the wooden supports of the bridge to protect them. Local carpenters put on a roof and covered the sides on the bridge to further protect it from the elements. Thus the first covered bridge appeared in America.

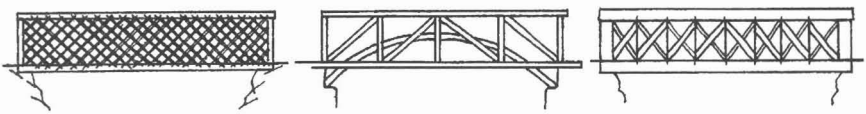
The *Quarterly* is published by the Rutland Historical Society, 96 Center Street, Rutland VT 05701-4023. Co-editors: Jim Davidson and Jacob Sherman. Copies are $2 each plus $1 per order. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to the *Quarterly* and the *Newsletter*.Copyright © 2002 The Rutland Historical Society, Inc. ISSN 0748-24493.

The Covered Bridges of Old Rutland Town: A Calendar

by Robert J. Cassidy

Rutland Township, which included the present day towns of Proctor, Rutland, West Rutland and Rutland City, had fourteen covered bridges in thirteen locations. Through the years, floods, vandals and highway improvements have taken their toll of all these bridges. The one remaining is used as a shed. Although Rutland's covered bridges no longer serve they did play an important part in Rutland's history.

The structure of a covered bridge is unique in that the rafters supporting the weight of the bridge and its traffic are above the passageway of the bridge. The truss or combination of rafters allows the weight of the bridge to be carried from one abutment to the other. Trusses were made of wood and were of many types. Four types were found in the Rutland area: the Town Lattice, the Burr Arch, the Howe Truss and a combination of the Town Lattice and the Burr Arch. Eleven of Rutland's covered bridges used the Town Lattice type truss. The placement of a roof on the bridge and covering the sides served to preserve the wood and extend the life of the bridge.



Town Lattice *Burr Arch* *Howe Truss*

COVERED BRIDGES OF N.E.

Half of the bridges in Rutland Township were built across the East Creek, while the other half were built along the Otter Creek. The Otter Creek flows through three of the four municipalities that comprise what was "old Rutland", while the East Creek only flows through what is now Rutland City and Rutland Town.

Of the seven bridges built across the Otter Creek, three were located in what is now Rutland Town. Two were located in what is now Rutland City. The last two were located in what is now Proctor. Starting in the south part of Rutland Town and working northward toward the Town of Proctor, the seven covered bridges formerly located along the Otter Creek were: the Billings Bridge, the Dorr Bridge, the Ripley Bridge, the

Gookin's Falls Railroad Bridge, the Center Rutland Falls Bridge, the Double Road Bridge and the Sutherland Falls Bridge.

The Billings Bridge was built about 1831 by Timothy K. Horton. It crossed the Otter Creek at the west end of Park Street and connected Park Street to the Creek Road. The Billings Bridge was a 107-foot long Town Lattice covered bridge and had a slate roof. During spring flooding it was not unheard of for the water to get as high as the roof. The weight of the slate roof has been credited for keeping the bridge from washing out during extreme flooding. When the flood of 1927 hit, the Billings Bridge was submerged under more than seven feet of water. The bridge's floorboards were floated off during this time, but the rest of the bridge survived. In early October of 1952 the Billings Bridge was found in need of some major repairs and was closed to traffic. The Rutland Town Select Board was supposed to take up the issue of fixing the bridge the following spring. Unfortunately a couple of weeks later on Halloween Night, the one hundred and twenty-one-year-old bridge was set afire by vandals and completely destroyed. The bridge was never replaced. The old stone abutments of the bridge still exist today.

The Dorr Bridge connected River Street across Otter Creek to Dorr Drive in Rutland City. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Evelyn Pierpoint in 1871. The bridge was 201½ feet long and had a center pier for extra support. Across the creek on a hill above the bridge was Fern Cottage, home of the daughter of Julia Ripley Dorr. Julia was Vermont's poet laureate of the time. Her home, The Maples, was just west of Fern Cottage. The Dorr Bridge was obviously named after the Dorr Family. The banks beneath the Dorr Bridge were well known for their fishing holes and many boaters enjoyed the calm waters below the bridge. The bridge was destroyed during the flood of 1927 and replaced by a steel bridge that is still in use today.

Down the road from the Dorr Bridge was the Ripley Bridge. It crossed the Otter Creek in Rutland City and connected Ripley Road to the intersection of Dorr Drive and Clement Road in front of where the College of Saint Joseph stands today. The Ripley Bridge received its name from the well-known Ripley family that owned a marble works along Ripley Road just before the bridge. The Ripley Bridge had a Burr Arch truss and was built sometime before 1856. The bridge was condemned in

March of 1902 and was replaced by a steel bridge that was destroyed during the flood of 1927.

About a fourth of a mile down stream from the Ripley Bridge was the Gookin's Falls Railroad Bridge. This bridge, built over the falls, was four spans long and had a Howe Truss for its supports. Built about 1851, it was used by the Rutland and Washington Railroad. The wooden Gookin's Falls Railroad Bridge was still in existence during the late 1860's but was replaced by a steel bridge sometime after that. The old stone abutments for the covered bridge were left in place to support the steel bridge.

The Center Rutland Bridge was just below the railroad covered bridge at Gookin's Falls. This highway bridge carried old Route Four across Otter Creek. Very little information is known about the original bridge. In 1875 a Town Lattice covered bridge was built after a fire destroyed the previous bridge. During the mid 1880's a steel bridge was built alongside the covered bridge for use by the Rutland Street Railway trolley. A 91-year-old resident of the Rutland area remembers seeing the wooden covered bridge before it was replaced by a steel bridge sometime in the early 1920's.

Further down stream on the Otter Creek, was the Double Road Bridge in what is now Proctor. This bridge, which crossed the Otter Creek about a mile and a half south of the village of Proctor, connected the East Proctor Road to the West Proctor Road. Nicholas Powers, D.C. Powers and Abraham Owen built the Double Road Bridge in 1840. The two Powers men and Owen were experienced covered bridge builders but could not agree on which type of truss to use for the bridge. Powers was fond of the Town Lattice truss while Owen preferred the Burr Arch. Finally all decided on a compromise and built the bridge using a Burr Arch bolted into a Town Lattice truss. The bridge, severely damaged during the flood of 1927, was repaired and put back into use. It eventually began to sag in the middle thus weakening the bridge. Early in 1950 a cement truck partly went through the floor, further damaging the bridge. Later that year, the Double Road Bridge was condemned by the State of Vermont, closed to traffic and finally torn down. The old stone abutments of the bridge can still be seen

Lewis Wolcott, a resident of Pittsford, built a covered bridge over the Otter Creek at Sutherland Falls, now Proctor Village, in 1841. Lewis used a Town Lattice truss to support the bridge. He included arched portals and long windows. Painted in white,

the bridge offered a very fine appearance. In 1915 the bridge was dismantled and replaced by a marble bridge that is still in use today.

Of the seven covered bridges built across the East Creek, four were in what is now Rutland Town and three were in what is now Rutland City. Starting in the north of Rutland Town and working southward toward Rutland City, the covered bridges of East Creek were: the Twin Bridges, the Lester Bridge, the Mill Village Bridge, the 1876 Bridge, the East Creek Railroad Bridge Number 88, and the West Street Bridge.

The Twin Bridges were located in Rutland Town where the East Pittsford Road crossed the East Creek. In 1849 Nicholas Powers built a fifty-foot long Town Lattice bridge across East Creek. The following year, during spring flooding, the east Creek changed course washing out one of the approaches to the bridge. Powers then built a second Town Lattice bridge that was sixty feet long. Both bridges were washed off their abutments during the flood of 1947. The first bridge was destroyed while the second was washed down stream but only slightly damaged. The second bridge was later moved to a site alongside the East Pittsford Road, only yards away from its original location. The Town of Rutland uses it as a storage shed.

Not far down stream from the Twin Bridges, where Route Seven crosses the East Creek, was the Lester Bridge. Located next to the Williams Farm it was built in 1845 by Nicholas Powers using the Town Lattice truss as its support. In 1931 it was dismantled to make way for a wider bridge.

South of the Lester Bridge, where McKinley Avenue crossed the East Creek, stood the Mill Village Bridge. Nicholas Powers built the bridge about 1870. It was a seventy-foot Town Lattice bridge that had a "boxy" look. It was known as a very sturdy bridge but its abutments were made of layers of stones with no cement or mortar keeping them together. It was destroyed by the flood of 1947 and replaced by a concrete and steel structure.

The Old 1876 Bridge was located on Grove Street near the Country Club a short distance down stream from the Mill Village Bridge. It was an 83½-foot long Town Lattice type bridge built by Nicholas Powers in 1876. The City completely restored the bridge in the early 1940's. The flood of 1947 washed the bridge away only a short time after its repair.

The East Creek Railroad Bridge Number 88 was a double-barreled railroad bridge built sometime before 1883. The Central Vermont Railroad used the north lane and the Delaware

and Hudson Railroad used the south lane. The one hundred and eleven-foot long Howe Truss bridge crossed the East Creek above the West Street Bridge in Rutland City. A steel bridge replaced it sometime after 1897.

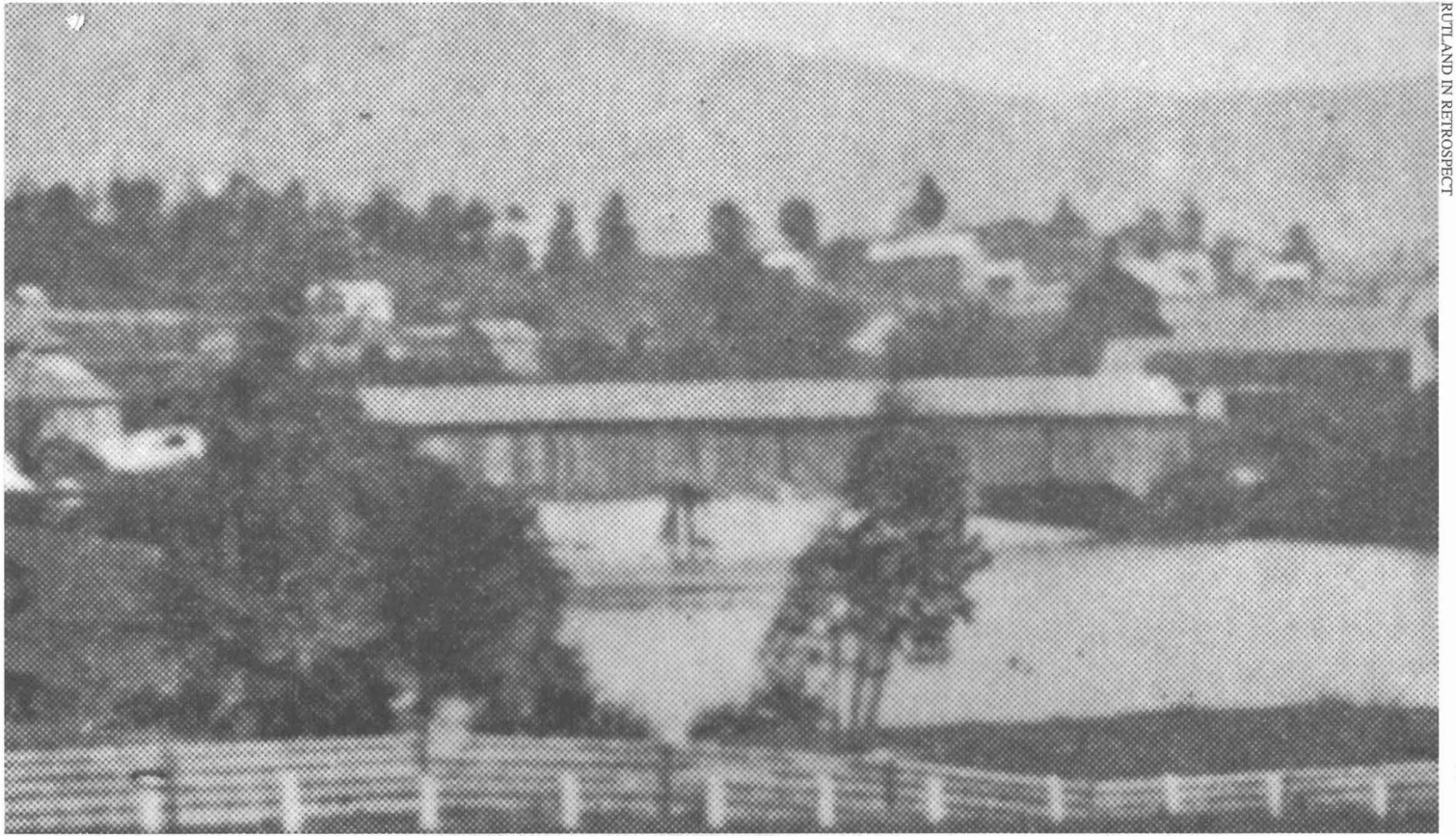
The West Street Bridge, located in Rutland City, was built about 1843. The bridge measured 91½ feet long and about 19 feet wide. It was a Town Lattice bridge on one of the main thoroughfares of Rutland Village. It was damaged by the flood of 1927 but survived. A concrete bridge replaced it in 1931.

Rutland's covered bridges were the scene of fights, robberies, murders and youthful shenanigans. The West Street Bridge frequently became the location of drunken brawls among the immigrant Irish on Saturday nights. When called to break up the fight, the local sheriff would often go to Meadow Street to get the Irish Catholic priest, Father Boylan. Father Boylan would then scold the whole lot of them for being sinful and shameful. As the crowd broke up Father Boylan reminded them that he expected to see them in church the next morning.

The Billings Bridge had a long list of crimes of violence in its history. Located in a lonely area, it was an excellent lurking spot for robbers. One cloudy night, Avery Billings was on his way to his home on the Creek Road. As he slowed his saddlehorse down to a walk to enter the bridge, an unseen hand seized the bridle. But Billings spurred his mount, rode the robbers down and escaped.

In the early 20th Century a fight under the Old 1876 Bridge turned into an infamous murder case involving Italian immigrants.

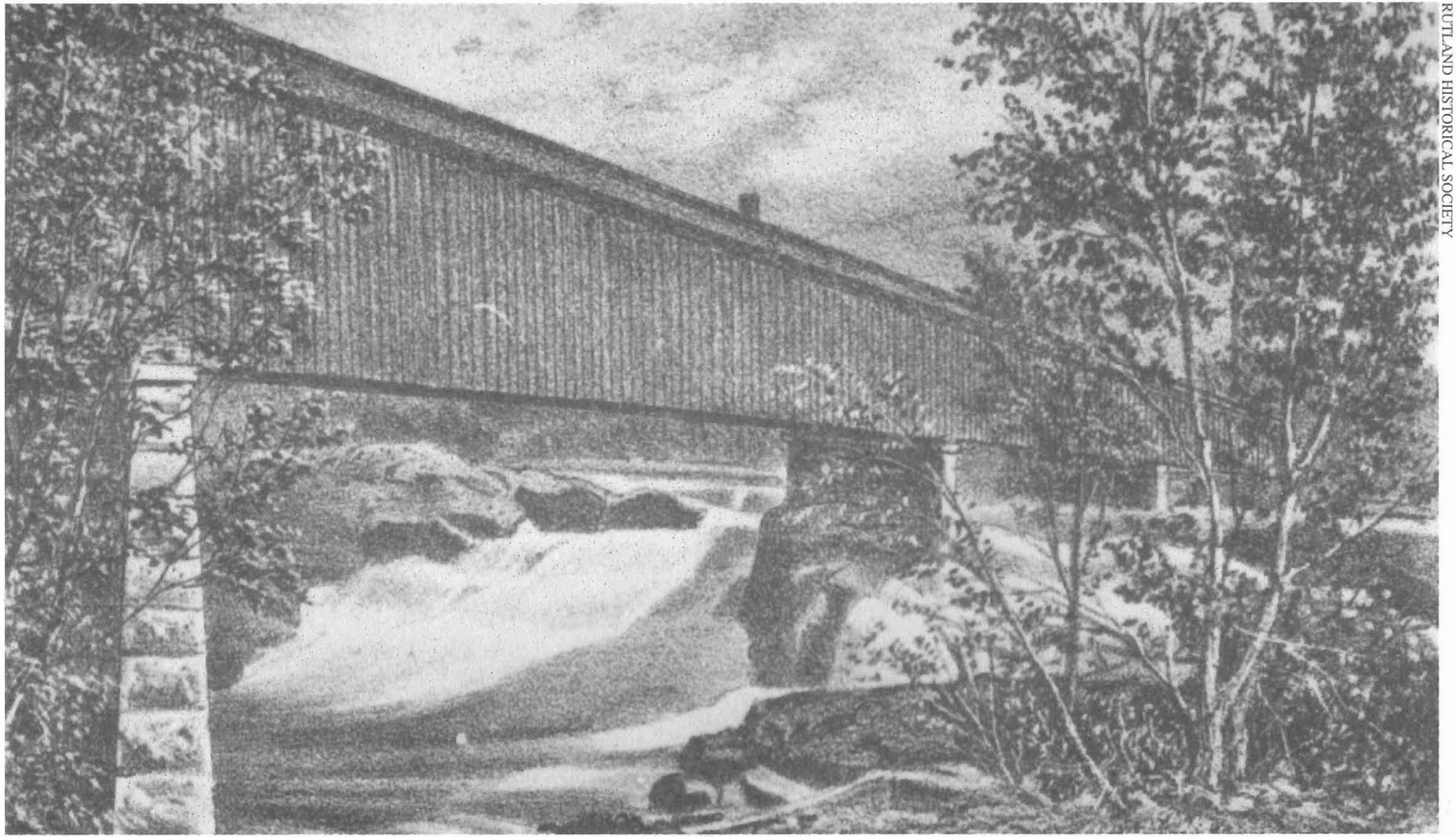
Sherwin Williams often tells of his youthful pranks with his boyhood friend Orin Thomas at the nearby Lester Bridge. The boys would take a wooden crate and wrap it up so that it would look like a package. Then they would nail it to the floor of the Lester Bridge. Then they would climb into the rafters of the bridge to await a passing car. Eventually someone would stop to pick up what appeared to be a valuable package. No matter how hard the person tried, it was impossible to pick up the package. Meanwhile high up in the rafters the boys tried to control their laughter so they wouldn't be heard or fall to the floor of the bridge. On one occasion the rather unhappy victims saw them and voiced their displeasure with this practical joke.



*The **Ripley Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek in Rutland City on Ripley Road between the former Ripley Marble Works and the present College of St. Joseph. It was a Burr Arch type bridge built before 1856. The builder is unknown. The 217-foot bridge, that may have been a double lane bridge, was replaced by a steel bridge in 1902.*

JANUARY 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 New Year's Day	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Gookin's Falls Railroad Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek in Rutland Town just above Gookin's Falls on the former Rutland & Washington tracks, now the Clarendon & Pittsford tracks. It was a Howe Truss type bridge of four spans. The builder and dimensions are unknown. Built about 1851, it was replaced by a steel bridge shortly after the Civil War.*

FEBRUARY 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12 Lincoln's Birthday	13	14 Valentine's Day	15
16	17 President's Day	18	19	20	21	22 Washington's Traditional Birthday
23	24	25	26	27	28	

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **1876 Bridge** crossed the East Creek in Rutland City on Grove Street near the Country Club. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Nicholas Powers in 1876. It was 83½ feet long and 16 feet wide. It was destroyed during the Flood of 1947.*

MARCH 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5 Ash Wednesday	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21	22
23 30	24 31	25	26	27	28	29

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Mill Village Bridge** crossed the East Creek in Rutland Town just off Route 7 on McKinley Avenue before Hendee's Garage. It was a 70-foot long Town Lattice type bridge built by Nicholas Powers about 1870. The bridge was destroyed during the Flood of 1947.*

APRIL 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
6 Daylight Savings Begins	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 Palm Sunday	14	15	16	17 Passover	18 Good Friday	19
20 Easter	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Twin Bridges** crossed the East Creek in Rutland Town on the East Pittsford Road. The 1849 bridge was 50 feet long and the 1850 bridge was 60 feet long. Both were Town Lattice type bridges built by Nicholas Powers. The 1849 bridge was destroyed in the 1947 Flood. The 1850 bridge was washed away but repaired and used as a storage shed near its original location.*

MAY 2003

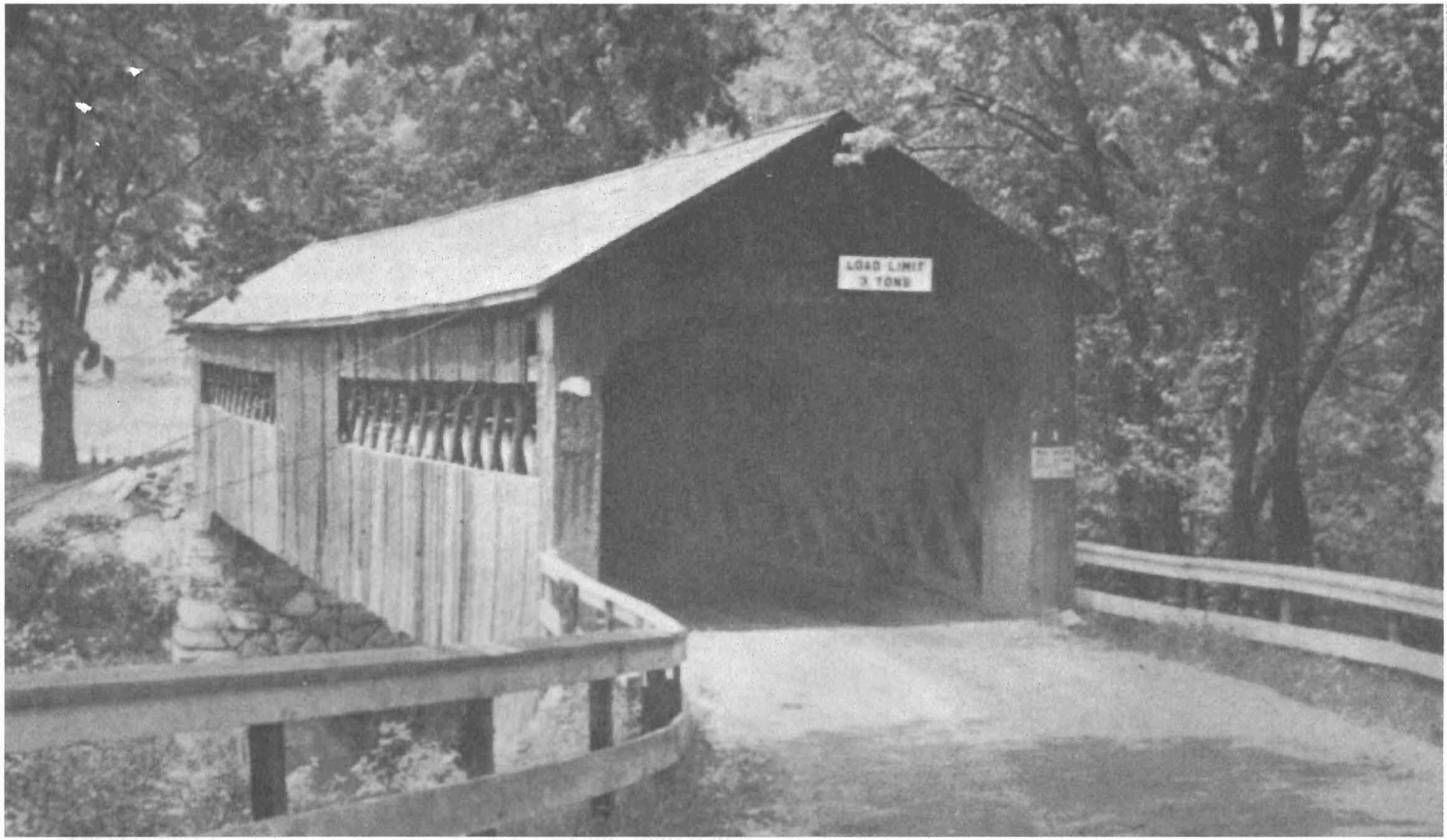
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 Mother's Day	12	13	14	15	16	17 Armed Forces Day
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 Memorial Day	27	28	29	30	31

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Center Rutland Highway Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek in Center Rutland just below Gookin's Falls. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built in 1875. The builder and dimensions are unknown. It was replaced by a steel bridge between 1920 and 1927.*

JUNE 2003

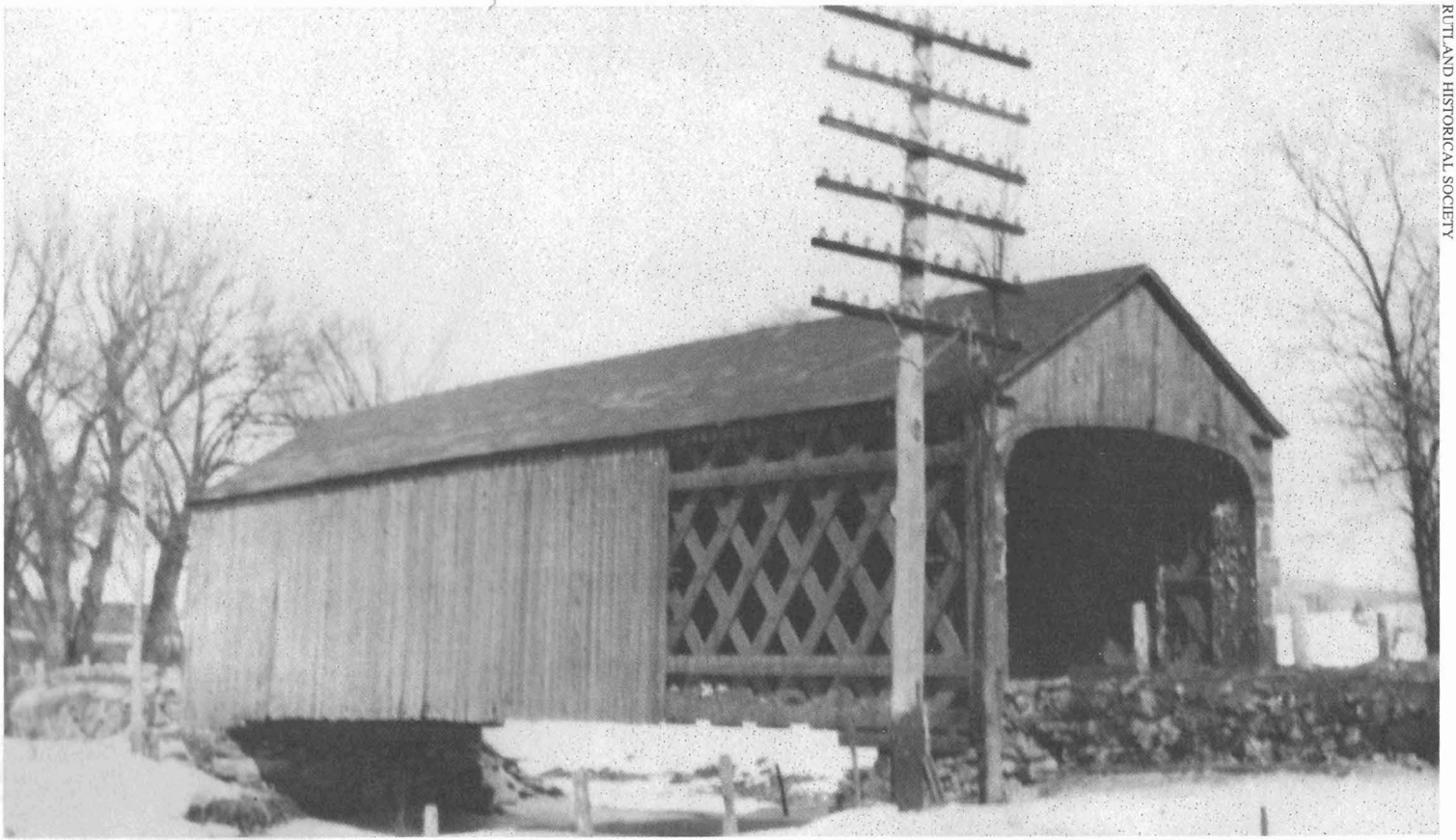
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Flag Day
15 Father's Day	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					



*The **Double Road Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek in Proctor at the old double road that ran between the West Proctor Road and Route 3 (the old East Proctor Road). It was a Town Lattice and Burr Arch type bridge built by Nicholas and D. C. Powers and Abraham Owen in 1840. Its dimensions are unknown. It was razed in 1950.*

JULY 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4 Independence Day	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Lester Bridge** crossed the East Creek in Rutland Town on Route 7 just before the Sherwin Williams Farm. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Nicholas Powers around 1845. Its dimensions are unknown. It was razed in 1931 to make way for a new concrete bridge.*

AUGUST 2003

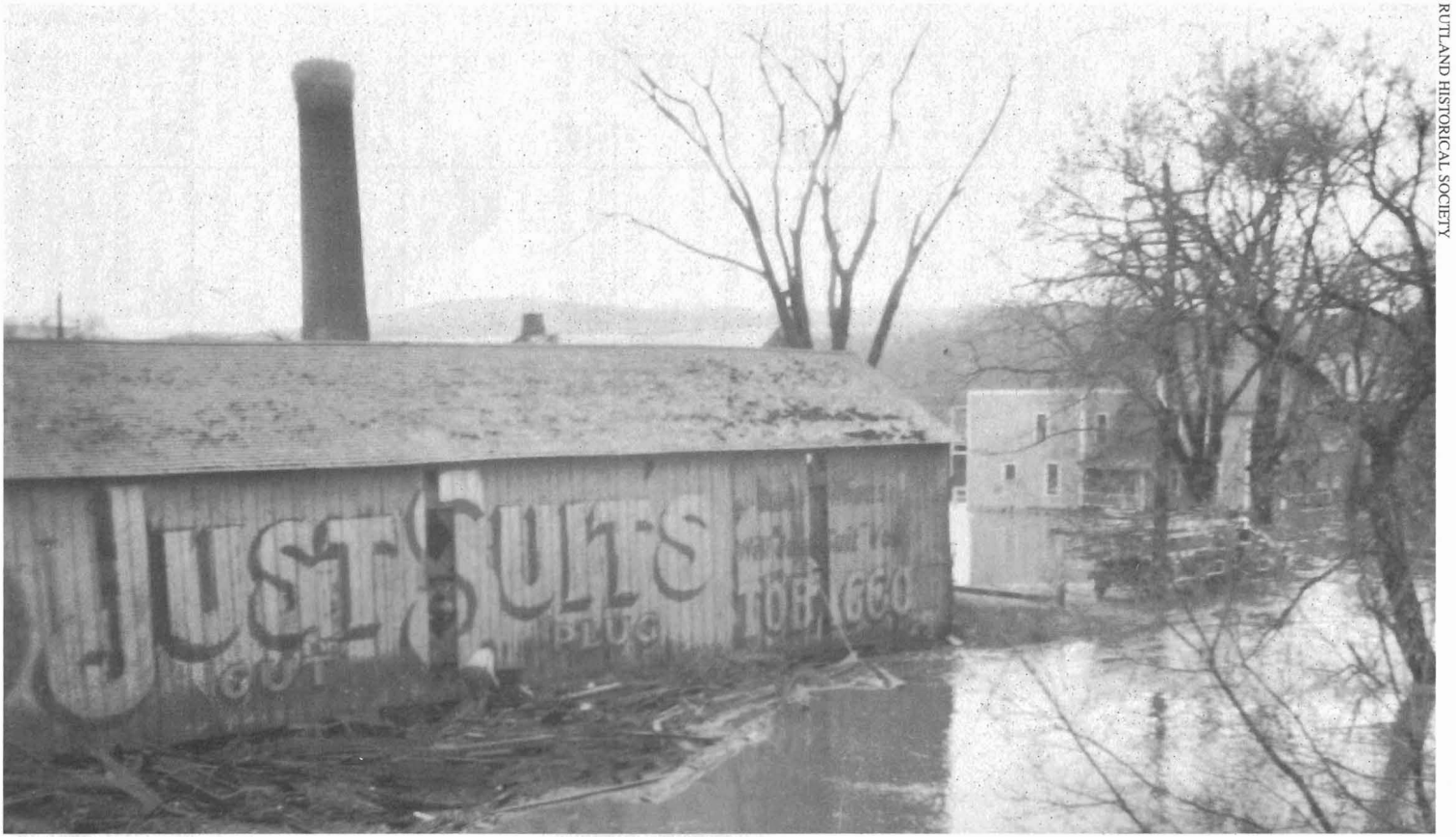
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 / 31	25	26	27	28	29	30

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Dorr Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek in Rutland City at the west end of River Street. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Evelyn Pierpoint in 1871. It was 201½ feet long and about 19 feet wide. It was destroyed by the Flood of 1927 and replaced by a steel bridge.*

SEPTEMBER 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 Labor Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 Rosh Hashanah
28	29	30				

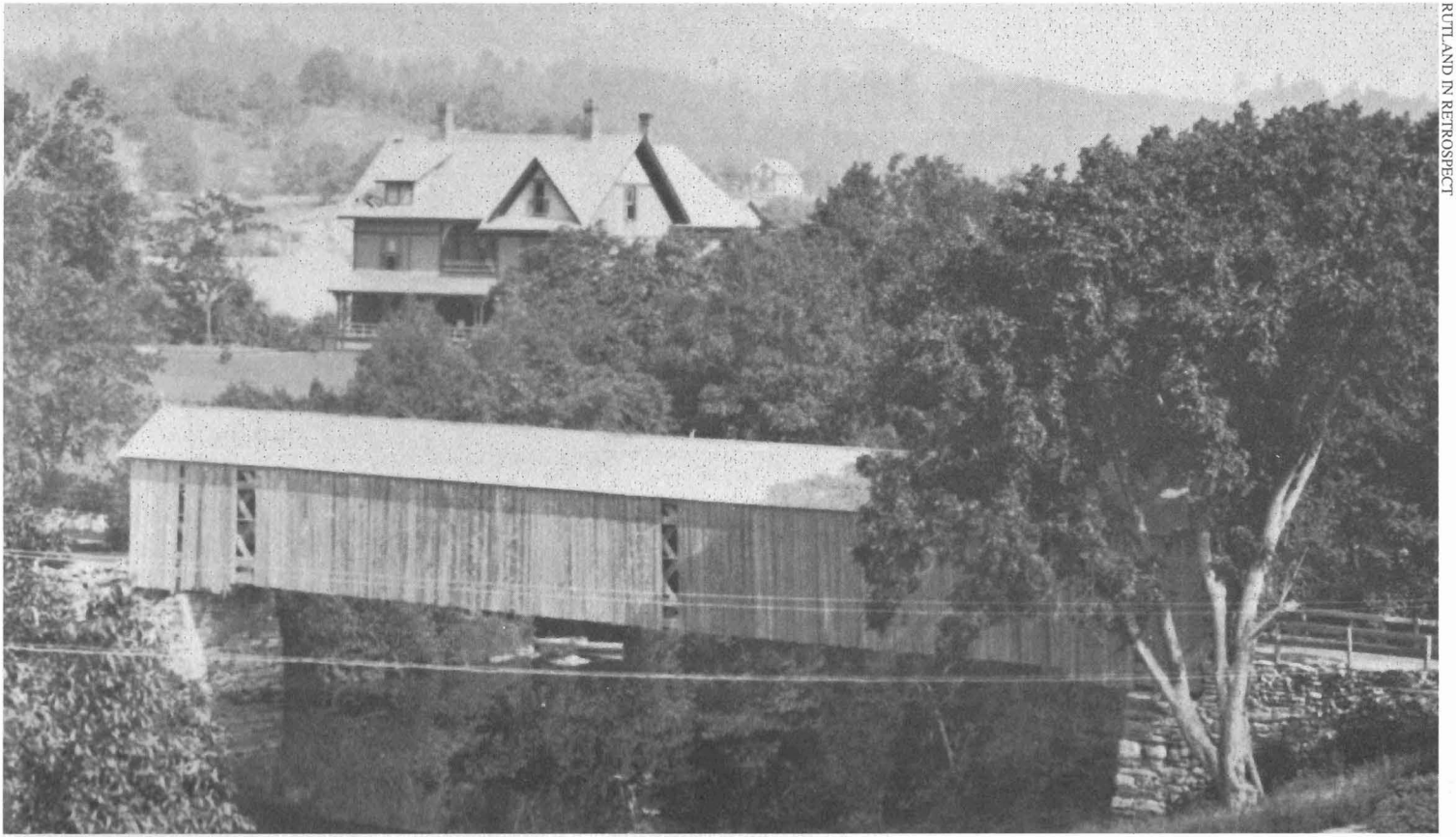


RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **West Street Bridge** crossed the East Creek on West Street in Rutland City between the present-day Young Spring Company and Agway. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built about 1843. The builder is unknown. The bridge measured 91 ½ feet long and about 19 feet wide. It was replaced by a concrete bridge in 1931.*

OCTOBER 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6 Yom Kippur	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 Columbus Day	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 Daylight Savings Ends	27	28	29	30	31 Halloween	



*The **Proctor Village Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek at the village in Proctor just before Sutherland Falls. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Lewis Wolcott around 1841. Its dimensions are unknown. It was replaced by a marble bridge in 1915.*

NOVEMBER 2003

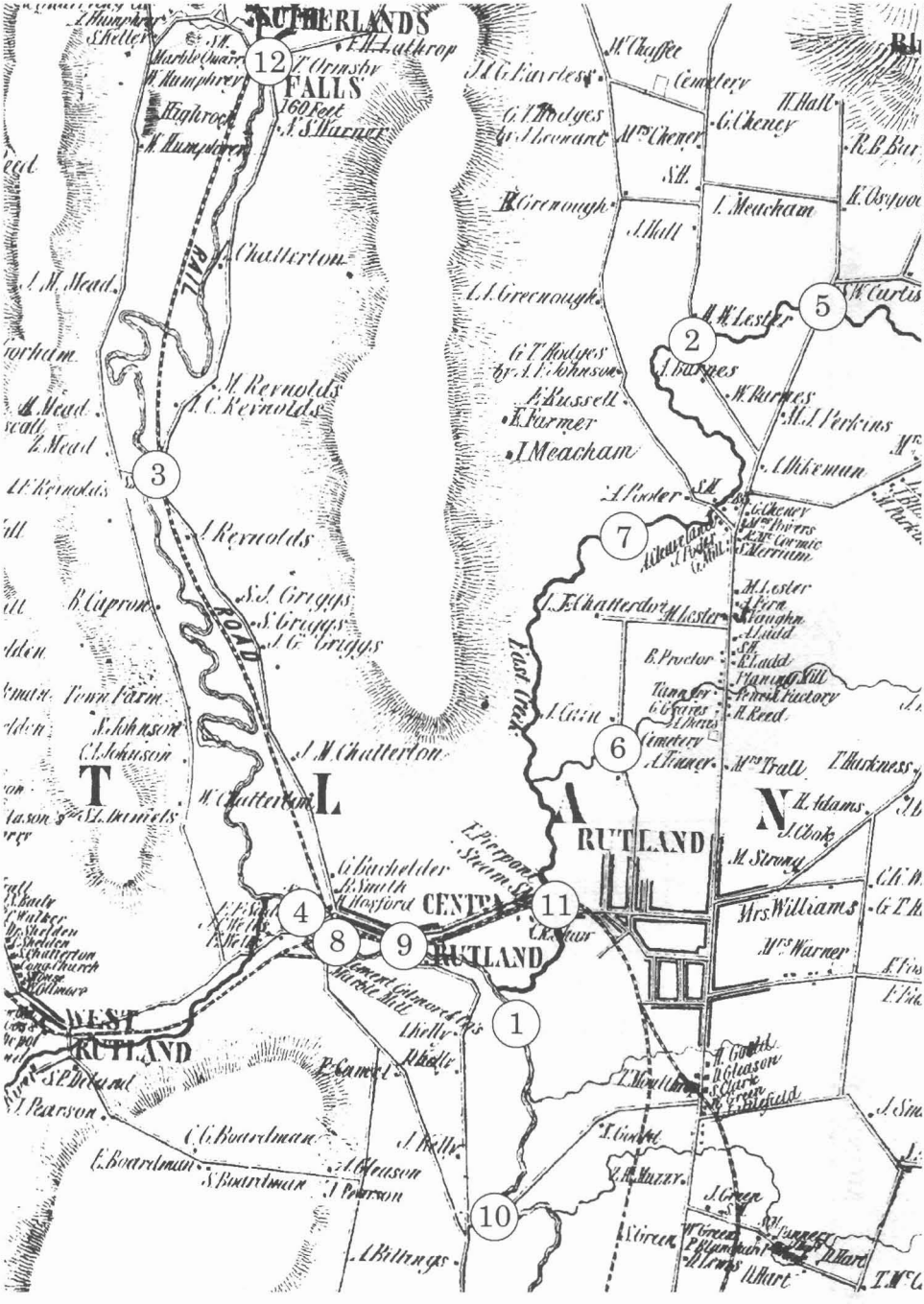
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4 Election Day	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 Veteran's Day	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23 30	24	25	26	27 Thanksgiving Day	28	29

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The **Billings Bridge** crossed the Otter Creek on Rutland Town at the west end of Park Street. It was a Town Lattice type bridge built by Timothy K. Horton in 1831. It was 107 feet long. It was destroyed by arson on Halloween night in 1952 at 11:09 p.m.*

DECEMBER 2003

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20 Hanukkah
21	22	23	24	25 Christmas Day	26	27
28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve			



(1) Dorr Bridge, (2) Lester Bridge, (3) Double Road Bridge, (4) Center Rutland Highway Bridge, (5) Twin Bridges, (6) Mill Village Bridge, (7) 1876 Bridge, (8) Gookin's Falls Railroad Bridge, (9) Ripley Bridge, (10) Billings Bridge, (11) West Street Bridge and (12) Proctor Village Bridge.